Udayarpalayam Samasthanam

A 500-Year Historical Study of a Southern Zamindari (AD 1500–1900)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the five-century evolutionary trajectory of the Udayarpalayam Samasthanam, an influential regional principality and subsequent zamindari estate situated in Tamil Nadu, South India. Utilizing an array of primary source materials—including local Inam registers, Old Settlement Registers (OSR), Persian land deeds, and private 19th-century diaries—this paper charts the geographic and political displacement of the "Kachi" lineage from their ancestral seat in Kanchipuram to their establishment as sovereign regional rulers. It further evaluates the family's distinct socio-religious mandate as protectors of sacred orthodox idols against early modern state expansion, and contextualizes their eventual structural adaptation under the legal-rational bureaucracy of the British East India Company and the subsequent post-independence land reforms.

Introduction & Origins: The "Kachi" Identity

The Udayarpalayam Samasthanam represents a vital case study in the longevity and adaptability of traditional political authorities in South India. Spanning from approximately AD 1500 through the mid-20th century, the estate carved out a distinct territorial, economic, and cultural footprint. The foundational lineage traces its origins to the ancient city of Kanchipuram, specifically from the historic "Raja Veedhi" (Princely Street). Due to this ancestral connection, the sovereign rulers adopted the prestigious prefix "Kachi," explicitly signifying 'Ruler of Kanchi,' as an immutable marker of their noble extraction.

By the turn of the sixteenth century, South Indian geopolitics was characterized by the hegemony of the Vijayanagar Empire under the rule of Veera Simha Rayar. The imperial center managed its far-flung territories across Jinji, Trichy, Madurai, Tanjore, and Mysore through a system of military commanderies and localized viceroys. Among these prominent local rulers was Ramabhadra Naik, who governed the strategically crucial Jinji state. It was into this complex feudal network that Sri Kachi Yuva Pallikonda Rangappa Kalakka Thola Udayar entered as a decisive military ally.

The Military Mandate & Imperial Titles

During the early 16th century, the Jinji state faced substantial existential threats from northern incursions, most notably from the forces of the Bedar Dynasty. In response, Ramabhadra Naik dispatched Kachi Pallikonda Rangappa Udayar to repel the invasion. Demonstrating exceptional tactical acumen and personal valor, Udayar achieved a decisive victory. In recognition of this critical service, the Vijayanagar Emperor bestowed comprehensive land honors (Jahgirs) along with a series of exalted honors and military insignias designed to formalize his elevated status:

> ***Bareed Sapthangaharanu:*** *Signifying the warrior who successfully severed the seven limbs of the hostile Bareed forces.*
> ***Uana Vijaya Vasi Kritlia Kainsia Thoothumhikahharana:*** *Granting the exclusive right to carry a specialized bell-metal war trumpet to proclaim sovereign triumphs in battle.*
> ***Kanakathanda Manditharuna Chathiralaiichana:*** *Awarding the royal insignia of a crimson ceremonial umbrella adorned with a solid gold handle.*
> ***Nava Vithanga Bherirava Mukaritha Diganthara:*** *Reflecting the cosmic resonance of his war drums, which pervaded all cardinal directions to drown out the sounds of retreating adversaries.*
> ***Kanchipurdthipala:*** *Legally confirming his ancestral stewardship as the rightful lord of Kanchipuram.*
> ***Kalakka Thola:*** *Honoring his administrative justice, comparing him to Yama, the cosmic arbiter of righteousness, in punishing wrongdoers.*

Complementing these titles, the sovereign grant was accompanied by material assets essential for independent regional consolidation: 12 royal war elephants, 200 fully equipped cavalry horses, and a standing army of 5,000 disciplined infantrymen. This significant transfer of military power laid the structural foundation for the autonomous domain that would soon define the region.

Socio-Religious Guardianship & The "Moorthy" Affiliation

As the lineage established its permanent center, successive rulers—notably Peria Nallappa Udayar and Kalyana Rangappa Udayar—systematically unified adjacent territories, creating a highly organized regional kingdom. By the 17th century, under the governance of Rangappa Udayar, the Samasthanam exercised administrative jurisdiction over 300 prosperous agrarian villages grouped into 27 distinct *mahanams* centered around the fortified palace complex at Udayarpalayam.

The political legitimacy of the Udayarpalayam rulers was intrinsically tied to their proactive defense of religious orthodoxy. Historical accounts compiled by colonial administrators, including Charles Stewart Crole in *The Chingleput, Late Madras, District*, emphasize a critical juncture during the expansion of the Mughal Empire. To protect the region's holiest icons from potential iconoclasm, the sacred idols of Kanchi Kamakshi, Chidambaram Natarajan, and Srirangam Perumal were secretly moved and securely housed within the fortified palace grounds of Udayarpalayam.

For a full ritual period of forty-eight days (a *mandalam*), the rulers maintained strict security, funded regular elaborate daily poojas, and ensured the unbroken continuity of worship within the inner sanctum of the palace. In permanent commemoration of this extraordinary act of religious preservation, the descendants permanently appended the sacred honorific title '**Moorthy**' to their official names, signaling their enduring role as divinely sanctioned protectors of the faith.

Ethnographic Context & The Thondaimandalam Heritage

Archival records dating to the mid-18th century, including documentation from 1765 AD during the reign of Muthu Vijaya Rangappa Udayar, explicitly categorize the ruling clan within the **Kachi Brahma Vanniyar** community. Historically, this group represented a specialized subset within the broader agrarian social matrix, practicing Vaishnavism, utilizing both Telugu and Tamil in administrative and domestic spheres, and assuming the honorific titles of 'Udayar' or 'Padayachi'.

This community maintained deep lineage connections to the ancient socio-geographic territory of Thondaimandalam. Traditional administrative records confirm that Thondaimandalam was systematically divided into 24 *Kottams*, 79 *Naadus*, and 1,900 distinct *Nathams* (townships), originally organized under the legendary ruler Ilanthirayan Thondaiman, a descendant of the Chola monarch Karikala. Private family records from the early 20th century (such as a 1912 archival deposition by forefather Govinda Padayachi) trace their native roots directly to Elangadu, an ancient Kottam within this classic framework, demonstrating a historical continuity spanning generations.

Colonial Integration, Revenue Records, and the Palur Zamin

The late 18th and early 19th centuries brought profound administrative disruptions with the decline of the Nawabs of Arcot and the steady expansion of the British East India Company. The Udayarpalayam rulers and their primary lineages demonstrated substantial strategic flexibility during this period. A notable primary source is a Persian Inam Deed issued in 1775 AD by the Nawab of Arcot, Muhammed Ali Khan Wallajah, which formally granted the village of Cuddalore to Vallimuthu Padayachi, an influential ally of the state, decreed to endure "as long as the sun and moon exist."

Following the consolidation of British regulatory authority, this permanent tenure was rigorously reviewed and authenticated by colonial revenue officials. The **Inam Fair Register of 1860 AD** officially validated Inam Deed No. 878, confirming the lands as a permanent *Grama Maniem* (ancestral village estate enjoyed collectively by village leaders). The administrative assessment recorded by Deputy Collector M. Sadasiva Pillai on July 25, 1861, reads:

> *"This maniem is enjoyed by the 15 persons mentioned in Col: 16 for house sites & backyards etc. & the exact portion held by each can is at [not] now ascertainable some of them are heirs & relatives of the person in the general account while others hold it by assignment from them or in virtue of their right as members of the Village Community... The best course therefore appears to be to give a common Title Deed in the names of the several persons..."*

By the mid-19th century, G. Doraisamy Padayachi acted as the principal architect of the estate's formal transition into the structured British legal framework. Moving beyond the fluid status of traditional *mirasidars*, the family solidified its standing as legally recognized landed aristocracy. Colonial land diaries from 1909 AD record an extensive, well-managed estate exceeding 500 acres of highly fertile wet and dry agricultural land.

His grandson, G. Ranganatha Padayachi (Zamindar of Palur), inherited these properties through a formal partition deed in 1944, managing 111 distinct survey sectors across Palur Mahanam, Pallavarayanatham, Chitrasoor, and Sanniyasipettai. G. Ranganatha Padayachi further elevated the family's scholarly and socio-political profile by marrying the daughter of **Rao Sahib K. Kothandapani Pillai**—a distinguished diplomat, prominent Tamil scholar, and direct descendant of the historic Chola military commander Karunakara Thondaiman.

The Ten-Generation Lineage Reconstruction

Through the cross-referencing of 19th-century colonial land logs, Fasli revenue accounts (Fasli 1381–1384), and family genealogical registers, the direct historical lineage can be definitively reconstructed across ten sequential generations, demonstrating a continuous presence from pre-colonial military service to modern professional standing.

GENERATION	NAME & TITLE	HISTORICAL & SOCIO-POLITICAL ROLE
Gen 1	**Vallimuthu Padayachi** (c. 1750)	Recipient of the 1775 Persian Inam Deed from the Nawab of Arcot.
Gen 2	**Veera Padayachi**	Managed estate preservation during the tumultuous Anglo-Mysore Wars.
Gen 3	**Rama Padayachi**	Consolidated localized agrarian control during early British settlement.
Gen 4	**Govinda Padayachi**	Philanthropist; constructed regional temples and schools; recorded in 1912 deeds.
Gen 5	**G. Doraisamy Padayachi**	Formalized the Palur Zamin boundaries; recorded in the 1909 Colonial Diary.
Gen 6	**Rao Sahib K. Kothandapani Pillai**	Eminent Indian Diplomat, Tamil Literary Scholar, and state administrator.
Gen 7	**P. G. Ranganathan**	Recognized Zamindar of Palur; managed estate transitions prior to abolition.
Gen 8	**R. Govindaswaminathan** (1946–2024)	Overseer of post-independence agricultural modernization and heritage tracking.
Gen 9	**Venkatesh Kumar G.**	Contemporary Author, Filmmaker, and historical researcher of the Samasthanam.
Gen 10	**Ilanthirayan Thondaiman**	Current generation; representative of the enduring historical lineage.

Conclusion & Epilogue

The historical trajectory of the Udayarpalayam Samasthanam and its primary lineages highlights the continuous adaptation of South Indian elites across major political shifts. Through strategic transitions—from medieval military commanders under the Vijayanagar Empire to legally recognized zamindars under British colonial rule, and finally to professional roles in post-independence India—the family maintained social significance by shifting from land-based authority to educational and professional achievement. Although the physical palace at Udayarpalayam stands partially in ruins today, the community's historical

impact remains clearly preserved through royal inscriptions at Gangaikonda Cholapuram and detailed archival records.

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